

Highway 965 project gets first infusion

Mar. 23, 2009

By Lori Lindner

NORTH LIBERTY LEADER

lori@northlibertyleader.com



North Liberty council member Jim Wozniak serves on the board of Johnson County Council of Governments.

NORTH LIBERTY- The gift of over a quarter-million dollars is rarely mentioned- or received- so casually.

In the final minutes of the North Liberty City Council meeting of March 10, member Jim Wozniak announced that the City of North Liberty will receive \$285,000 from the Johnson County Council of Governments (JCCOG) for a traffic signalization project that could significantly assist traffic flow on Highway 965.

In addition, it will take a considerable chunk out of the highway's overall improvement costs.

The funding is part of the Federal Government's \$789 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus package, \$360 million of which was allocated to Iowa for transportation projects and equipment. The Iowa Department of Transportation, in turn, divvied up about one-third of their funding among regional and metropolitan planning organizations using a population-based formula. JCCOG, as this area's Metropolitan Planning Organization, was given \$3.6 million of stimulus funds to divide among area transportation improvement projects in Johnson County.

Initially, said JCCOG Executive Director John Yapp, JCCOG's Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (TTAC) received about \$30 million worth of projects to review, but stringent guidelines attached to the money disqualified some of the submissions.

"One of the stimulus fund requirements was that the money be spent very quickly," said Yapp. "After going through the initial requests, it was determined about \$13 million in requests would clearly qualify"

Wozniak, a JCCOG board member, explained that projects had to be "shovel ready," meaning their construction had to be underway within one calendar year. Also, projects with land acquisition issues were not considered. North Liberty submitted three project funding requests, including a Dubuque Street resurfacing and a trails project.

"North Liberty could have submitted additional projects, but ultimately, some did not fit the federal guidelines," said Wozniak.

JCCOG's TTAC made a list of their recommended projects and a funding level for each, which was then offered to the JCCOG board for approval. The list passed with a vote of 8-5.

Wozniak surmised that some JCCOB board members disapproved because certain projects were under-funded, while others received 100 percent of the estimated costs. North Liberty's signalization of the intersection at Cherry Street and Highway 965 was one of the lucky ones. The \$285,000, which will be reimbursed after construction begins, should cover the entire signalization project.

"I am excited because we got a fair portion of the stimulus money that came to JCCOG," Wozniak said. "I am happy that the project was the most important project North Liberty submitted, and that we got full funding to help make the project a reality very quickly"

Entities not completing their projects with the one-year time frame will have to give their allocations back to JCCOG for redistribution to under-funded projects, noted Yapp.

Of JCCOG's \$3.6 million, Iowa City received a total of \$2.4 million, Coralville was given \$420,000, and Johnson County received \$252,000 (for a North Dubuque trail extension). The University of Iowa was given \$200,000 and University Heights received \$50,000. Yapp said the TTAC based some of the award amounts on the precept that the county and the University of Iowa could receive stimulus funds from other sources as well.

Wozniak said he is pleased that the nature of the signalization project supports the purpose of ARRA stimulus package.

"When everyone first talked about the stimulus bill, we talked about improving infrastructure that is falling apart, but also about providing infrastructure that increases productivity. I think this project best fit the original spirit of the stimulus bill," he said. Creating less wait time on Highway 965, North Liberty's main north-south thoroughfare, will "get people to work faster, which will improve productivity and ultimately increase economic stimulus"

Highway 965 is slated for complete revamping from Coralville to North Liberty's northern city limits, a \$45 million widening project shared between the cities of Coralville and North Liberty. The improvements are to be completed in seven phases over the next 15 years.